

SPINE SURGERY FOR HERNIATED DISC

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is a herniated disc?

A herniated or ruptured disc occurs when the cover of a disc weakens and bulges after an injury or for no apparent reason. A disc may herniate because of strain, a sudden jarring injury, or age. A herniated disc may put pressure on a nerve or the spinal cord. This pressure can make one leg or arm hurt or feel numb or become weak. Over time, the muscles in that leg or arm may even get smaller. This is called muscle wasting. You may have tests such as a CT scan or MRI to see how significant your injury is. You may have already tried bedrest, medication, a chiropractor, or physical therapy. If these treatments did not relieve your symptoms, you may need surgery. A discectomy is a surgical procedure that removes a damaged disc or discs from your spine.

What can I do to prevent additional back injury?

Using good body mechanics may prevent back injury. Good body mechanics include keeping your back straight and avoiding twisting or turning motions. Some important points to remember include:

- Make sure that you have a firm mattress on your bed.
- When lying on your back, place 2 or 3 pillows under your knees and the lower part of your legs to raise them.
- When lying on your side, bend your knees and use a pillow between your legs to keep your hips and knees level.
- When you pick things up off the floor, bend your hips and knees and keep your back straight.
- Do not twist at the waist.

If you have had a fusion, do not take anti-inflammatory medications without first consulting with your neurosurgeon. Anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Alleve, Motrin) or prescription medications such as Vioxx, Celebrex, or Naprosyn may interfere with healing. If you have questions about the safety of these or any medications, call your neurosurgeon.

What Do I Need To Do For Follow-Up?

- Take your medications as prescribed (see discharge instruction form).
- Call your physician to schedule a follow-up visit.
- Your physician may want you to go to physical therapy. Check with your physician before you start any exercise program.
- During the first weeks following surgery, riding in a car may increase back pain. Limit car riding if it is uncomfortable.
- Check with your physician about when it is safe to drive.
- Check with your physician about how soon you should shower.
- Check with your physician about when it is safe to return to work.

What Do I Need To Report to My Physician?

Although complications following spine surgery are uncommon, you need to be aware of those signs and symptoms that warrant a call to your physician.

Call your physician for the following:

- Your incision is swollen, red, or has pus coming from it. This may mean it is infected.
- Your stitches/staples come apart.
- Your bandage becomes soaked with blood.
- You have a temperature over 101⁰F
- You feel weak, numb, or have pain in your back, buttocks, or legs (which is new).
- You feel pain or notice redness, or swelling in either of your lower legs. This could mean there is a blood clot in your lower leg.
- You have questions or concerns about your surgery or medicine.

SEEK CARE IMMEDIATELY IF:

- You have trouble breathing all of a sudden. This could be a sign that you have a blood clot in your lung. It could also mean that you are allergic to a medicine you are taking.
- You cannot control when you urinate or have a bowel movement.
- You cannot feel or move your legs.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org, and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education Rev. 9/04